

John Lekic

Hon. Gary L. Sharpe, Senior U.S. District Judge  
James T. Foley U.S. Courthouse  
445 Broadway, Room 112  
Albany, NY 12207

Dear Judge Sharpe,

My name is John Lekic, and I am a business owner in Dutchess County, NY. I own both Le Express Bistro in Wappingers Falls, and Farmers & Chefs Hudson Valley Food Trucks and Catering.

I am writing this letter to show support for my friend Iani Tassev whom I have known for almost 12 years. I first met Iani in 2005, as one of my customers, at a restaurant I used to manage, Sapore Steakhouse in Fishkill NY. We have a shared passion for food and quickly became friends. He has the passion you would see in a chef, and loves to explore different cuisines and experience different restaurants. Over many years, I have gotten to know Iani and I can say he is an extremely genuine individual. His desire to help change and better the world is inspiring to not only myself but to those around him. He has the intelligence and creativity to truly make a difference in bettering his community. I like his ideas about energy and batteries and how these technologies could change the world. He is someone who not only has amazing inspiring ideas but also has positive energy and drive to make them a reality.

I met him at the turning point in my life where he nudged me in the direction where I challenged myself and enabled me to undergo a personal growth. Since then I believe I accomplished much, I became a known chef / restaurateur in Hudson Valley. I have strongly engaged in promoting Farm Dinners as a Part of Hudson Valley Experience. We work with Taste of New York and other local Farmers Markets, Local Historic Sites, festivals and local food products. We try hard to promote this understated side of New York. This matters as it will promote tourism and local economy and it will have a positive effect on our community.

Iani is friend and a lot of things that I have done might of not happened if I did not know him. I understand mistakes were made in the past, we all make them. I know one thing though

Iani would never hurt anyone, on the contrary he would always help whenever he can. He is a solid individual and a true person and he deserves a chance to show that he can redeem himself through his future actions and contributions.

I will stand and vouch for him Your Honor.

Sincerely,

John Lekic

Frank Rinaldi



Hon. Gary L. Sharpe, Senior U.S. District Judge  
James T. Foley U.S. Courthouse  
445 Broadway, Room 112  
Albany, NY 12207

Dear Judge Sharpe,

My name is Frank Rinaldi and I am a real-estate broker in Nevada. I was born in New York and grew up in the Hudson Valley. That is where I met Iani Tassev in 2001 and that is also where I met my wife. We have a beautiful 2-year-old son named Leo and another baby on the way. We have lived in Henderson, NV for the past 7 years and we have kept in touch with Iani constantly as he is to me and my wife like family.

I am writing this letter of support of Iani Tassev because it is very important to me and my family for you to better understand how this person has positively influence my life and many others' lives.

Since the day I met Iani he has been an inspiration for me. We practically grew out of our teens together and he always pushed me to go to my classes and complete a college degree. He has that unique ability to get one excited about completing a task and to bring all the positive effects that could follow into the present. I am naturally a skeptic and do not trust strangers and Iani is the exact opposite. He is an extreme optimist and is willing to do anything for a stranger. In many ways this has complemented our deep friendship bringing in a unique balance. I have learned from Iani how to follow my dreams and take responsibility. Iani has taught me that being upfront and honest is the best way to be in life. I employ this rather rare quality every day at my job. Clients are first taken by surprise to my honesty, opinion and lack of desire to make a quick profit on a transaction but soon after they realize that the one who has your best interest will not apply the marketing gimmicks of the modern world.

Iani is an honest friend. He has had many tough conversations with me throughout the years and I always appreciated his unbiased view on problems and always going the extra mile to assure me that everything will be ok. He is undoubtedly full of energy and intelligence and I am happy to see he has put that to good use in creating jobs and businesses the last 7 years.

One of the hardest decisions in my life was to move away from the Hudson Valley. I grew up with a single parent that struggled with drug addiction my entire life and Iani was a firsthand witness of the dysfunction surrounding I had. He encouraged me to take a leap of faith and move away from my comfort zone and put behind a place that now reminds me of pain and suffering. We had numerous conversations and with his moral support I made the best decision

of my life – to start fresh and pursue a career at something I knew nothing about. The first two years after my move it was very hard but Iani encouraged me to stick with it and let the opportunities in life flow my way. I am sure Iani would have loved to have me around in his tough times of his own but he knew what was best for me was more important.

Iani is a person with high moral standards and deep care for the truth. He is a good father and dear friend. He is a person that deserves a second chance and one that will never repeat a mistake. He is honest and sincere in his love for all that is living and all that makes our life so full.

Frank Rinaldi

John Drew

Garden City, NY  
11530

Hon. Gary L. Sharpe  
Senior U.S. District Judge James T. Foley U.S. Courthouse  
445 Broadway, Room 112  
Albany, NY 12207

Dear Judge Sharpe:

My name is John Drew and I am writing this letter to serve as a character reference on behalf of Iani Tassev. I am an Assistant Professor at Adelphi University and have known Iani for more than fifteen years.

The nature of my relationship with Iani over the years has varied but what seems most relevant to write about in this context is the fact that I have relied on Iani for Information and Technology support for many years and without his keen IT insight and willingness to teach me so much of what he knows, it is safe to say that I would not be in the professional position that I am today. Indeed, while Iani was still attending Bard College and I was fortunate enough to meet him having only recently graduated from college myself it quickly became apparent to me that his intellect and generosity were comparable to very few people I have met before. Iani has taught me more than most people I have ever come to know and I believe most people that come to know Iani will speak similarly highly of him. He has a brilliant mind and while he was in college he let some of that brilliance take him down a path in which he has paid significant price. Iani is no longer in college and I am certain he regrets the decision making he made at that time.

As a professional educator who spends a great deal of time interfacing with college students, some brilliant and some less so, I can tell you first hand that there are many, many other students out there doing stupid things while they are in college simply because they are on their own for the first time and that, in many ways, is what college in America has become, for better or for worse. Iani has never been a drinker or consumer of drugs of any sort. Iani's problem was that he learned at college how to do what thousands of other young adults do at college all across the country---- only better and precisely because of his unique intelligence.

Iani is very humbled by all that has happened and has worked very hard to try and prove that. He now has two children and does everything a great parent does for their children and their family. His vision for them and for the community around him is all about creating peace, stability, comfort and meaningful connection with community. I have always known Iani as a community player but watching him become a father of two has shown me that this is a young

man that builds family and community with the same ambition he builds businesses. For example, when my father died and under horrific circumstances and I was tasked with the very tall order of moving my mother to NY from the country in which they had only both just retired in I turned to Iani for help and within a matter of days he found and secured the apartment that would become the place my mother and I would live and grieve in for nearly three years. Iani did not have to do this but he knew that the circumstances were very tragic and unique and as a consequence, he literally stopped everything he was doing at the time and created an avenue for which my mother and I could begin to regain our footing. I will never forget this act of generosity and I will remain forever in awe of what this type of behavior really signifies about Iani.

To conclude, I would like to say that as an educator, I firmly believe it is society's responsibility to not turn our backs on good kids or young adults that make stupid decisions. Iani is one of the gentlest and kindest people I know and it brings me great grief that he is still suffering the consequences of poor decision making while he was in college. I do know that he will never make that type of mistake again and that if given the chance to remain in this country, he's only make this country better with his rehabilitated sense of purpose, ambition and friendliness towards others.

Sincerely,

John Drew  
Assistant Professor of Digital Media  
Adelphi University

Mona Merling



Hon. Gary L. Sharpe, Senior U.S. District Judge  
James T. Foley U.S. Courthouse  
445 Broadway, Room 112  
Albany, NY 12207

Dear Judge Sharpe,

My name is Mona Merling, and I am a J.J. Sylvester Assistant Professor of mathematics at Johns Hopkins University. I am writing this letter in support of my brother-in-law Iani Tassev. My sister Lisa Merling and Iani have been domestic partners since 2011 when they got engaged and they have two children together, Elias and Maya Tassev. Iani has become a very close family member to me and my husband Nick over the years.

Iani is a highly intelligent person and he recognizes that he has made a big mistake by committing this crime ten years ago. The burden of the upcoming sentencing has always been palpable in his and my sister's life. At the center of Iani's worries are of course his children who are dependent on him now. While he is taking full responsibility for his past actions, it pains him dearly that now not only he, but his partner Lisa and his children will have to pay the price.

Iani is a very warm and family oriented person. His life now absolutely revolves around his children—it's hard to imagine someone more excited than I remember Iani was when they learned they would be parents, or after the long hours in the delivery room with my sister when he finally got to hold his first-born Elias, and his second-born, Maya. I believe that the birth of his children has had a profound effect and has been a transformative experience for Iani. Iani is a very devoted father who absolutely adores his children. He is the one who usually cooks for everyone in the family and who takes on a lot of the daily chores involved in taking care of the children. It is clear that every moment spent with his children is precious, even those times when they are crying and screaming or need to have their diapers changed.

Iani has been a wonderful partner to my sister and a caring son-in-law for our mother who has been living with them ever since they had the first child. Iani is also the main provider in the family, and it would be immensely difficult for my sister and the children to get by without him. Not only is Iani wonderful to his own family, but he is very warm and generous to other people. For example, several times when I was visiting Iani and Lisa, Iani was hosting one of his employees with her small daughter who is disabled and cannot walk. It was clear to me that Iani took personal interest in the well-being of their family. This is one instance of many times I have witnessed employees, friends of friends, acquaintances, all being welcomed in Iani's home.

Ever since I found about the sentencing I have been very distraught, and I am thankful for the chance to offer my thoughts. Thank you for taking the time to consider this letter. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

*M. Merling*

Mona Merling

Nicholas Sharac



Hon. Gary L. Sharpe, Senior U.S. District Judge  
James T. Foley U.S. Courthouse  
445 Broadway, Room 112  
Albany, NY 12207

Honorable Judge,

My name is Nicholas Sharac. I am a postdoctoral fellow at the Naval Research Laboratories in Washington D.C, researching nanophotonics. I have known Iani Tassev for the past six years in the context of friend and more recently, brother-in-law—he is my wife Mona Merling’s sister’s fiance. I also know his entire family very well, and over the years have watched both the Tassevs and Merlings unite as one, largely due to Iani’s generous spirit and family orientedness. With his brother, Iani has both started and successfully run two separate companies that I am aware of.

Iani has talked about his past wrongdoings in exactly the manner I would expect of someone who has never done anything else wrong since and who has grown vastly in the ten plus years since committing them. He recognizes that he is at fault and is prepared to pay for his crime, yet there is little else connecting the man today and the one guilty of those crimes. Now he has a family and responsibilities to a legitimate company that he helped start (the other was sold).

I am writing this letter in support of Iani, not just as an obligated friend and family member, but as a genuine admirer of someone whom I feel embodies both the entrepreneurial and family spirit of America. If you meet Iani, likely the first thing you’re aware of is that this is a very intelligent person, one who is hungry to put his talents to good use. He has done this twice alongside his brother, founding the companies (need the names) and when I have stayed over, I have seen Iani stay up all night studying various subjects, from multiple coding languages to nanotechnology. He has put this same passion into his employees, wanting to see them excel professionally, while offering them housing and transportation. I once had lunch with Iani in Alexandria one summer, and watched him give his business card to his waiter, who was also from Bulgaria, in case he was interested in working with him. This is just how Iani operates. In fact, I have seldom shared a meal with Iani where he was not treating at

least one employee with him. When I think of an entrepreneur, Iani is exactly the kind of personality I want to think of?someone who genuinely loves his employees and can include them in his vision. Whatever ways Iani may have misused his talents a decade ago, he is certainly using them constructively now.


I have two further anecdotes I would like to share. The first was almost two years ago in Maryland at his one year old son's baptism. His parents had flown in from Bulgaria and his brother from New York. He had his mother film while he made a speech about his son being the first Tassev/Merling to be born an American Citizen, and I have seldom seen someone so proud. The second was about three months ago, also in Maryland, when Iani confided to me privately over lunch his speculations about his sentencing. He wasn't angry or even scared. The only thing he could think about was what would be best for his two children and their mother. This is where Iani's concerns are. As the main provider for his family, Iani is not just responsible for his two infant children and fianc, but has also taken on caring for my wife's mother.

Thank you very much for reading this letter and hopefully for taking it into consideration.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Sharac

Pavleta Alexieva



Hon. Gary L. Sharpe, Senior U.S. District Judge  
James T. Foley U.S. Courthouse  
445 Broadway, Room 112 Albany, NY 12207

Dear Judge Sharpe:

I am Pavleta Alexieva and I am originally from Sofia, Bulgaria and I have been living in the USA for 23 years. I am the marketing manager for Restaurant Associates at Morgan Stanley in New York City. I am writing this letter of support of Iani Tassev who is a dear friend of mine. Mr. Tassev and I have known each other for over 20 years. We met while I was in high school in Bulgaria.

Since high school graduation I have been best friends with Iani and I have witness first hand his inspiring personality and life struggles. He is one of the most hard working, intelligent, self-motivated, entrepreneurial people I know. Mr. Tassev values his family and friends, which I admire a lot in him. He is extremely dedicated to his kids and we have had numerous conversations addressing his concerns of his ability to be with them upon concluding his legal proceedings. Yes, Mr. Tassev made a terrible mistake to be involved in the sale of marijuana and I have witnessed his internal struggle to cope with that laps of judgement for the past 6 years. I strongly believe that Mr. Tassev is very remorseful of his action and would never again take risks that threaten his time as a father and as a free man.


He is so positive and always has a bright look in life. Iani's reputation has always been the person to go to when you need advise, assistance and moral support. He loves his job, his work ethic is exceptional and he gives 100% dedication. While he is always ready to give back, I do know that this moment in life for Iani is hard because he has to ask for help himself. I strongly support for him to be given a second chance and not to be incarcerated.

I clearly remember a conversation I had with Mr. Tassev back in the Summer of 2009 when he confessed to me his misdeeds. He shared with me his desire to change his life and separate himself from any people around him that had the bad influence. He did exactly that. He moved away from Red Hook, NY and commenced a new life. He was aware that he would have to answer for his actions and to take responsibility. Iani has lived this life in the last few years battling his wrong decisions early on and I can, yet again, assure you that not only has Iani made every effort to do what is right but he also indeed establish a new beginning for himself with your Honor's leap of faith.

Sincerely,

Pavleta Alexieva

Stamen Tashev



Hon. Gary L. Sharpe, Senior U.S. District Judge  
James T. Foley U.S. Courthouse  
445 Broadway, Room 112  
Albany, NY 12207

Dear Judge Sharpe:

I am Iani's father. I have served about 35 years in several state agencies and NGO's in Bulgaria.

Both me and my wife were shocked when we found out about Iani's trials. He was very sorry and asked me to forgive him. My answer was: "I can forgive you for anything you have done unless you have physically hurt somebody." And he really changed.

Since then Iani has been very cautious not to break any rule anywhere in any field and he continues to comply with all the rules he is aware because he wants to live in the States (I liked this country in 1976 when visited my uncle who was an artist in Ringling Brothers Circus and transferred this love to my kids.).

Iani and his brother were working hard to develop a successful business in the energy sector. They would spend about 12 hours per day with their US employees and with their Bulgarian outsourcing team. He was very devoted person and maintained very good relationship with the team and counterparts. Iani was supportive mentor and encouraged others to excel and improve their skills and even pursue careers outside his companies. He has extravagant and brave ideas for transport development which are more than innovative and I am afraid that possible negative development of his trial can impede his efforts and plans.

Iani is a very caring person. He used to help me and my wife, his grandparents, neighbors and friends in many ways. Fortunately, Iani established a family and the kids changed his view on life and his priorities. Now he is more responsible and devotes most of his time and efforts to our grandchildren.

Iani has always been eager to work and make his own money. He was 14 years old in 1996 when his brother was student in the States and we had about three thousand per cents inflation in Bulgaria. We were frustrated that we would not be able to support his brother and

buy him a ticket to come back. Iani had witnessed our worries and one evening he gave to his mother a lot of money. We were afraid about their origin. It appeared that this money he has earned by washing luxury cars in front of the hotel in our neighborhood after school hours just to help us. Later in the same manner he would work in Middlesex school in the kitchen and in the computer lab. I shall never forget the tears in the eyes of his teachers while he was taking farewell with them and his many friends at graduation. The school management recognized his skills and devotion and offered him a job to maintain the computer network.

I was born and raised to help others. I am member of Rotary and Iani took some of this. He is very sensitive towards any form of injustice or unfairness in human relations. He is very generous and helpful not only towards immediate or remote members of our family. He responds to any need from friends, colleagues and unknown and will find way to support them. Numerous times he has either accommodated, transported, helped with computer maintenance or just did favors for free. He was interested in politics and inspired me to fight for the law to limit the cash payments in my country. There are many examples which I could mention and many friends of ours who would be ready to write a support letter in favor of Iani.

In conclusion, let me mention that the extended time and stress related to his trial most probably is negatively affecting his stability and could have negative effect. I shall pray sincerely that you apply the parental approach and give him a chance to stay and be with his kids in the United States!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stamen Tassev', with a stylized, flowing script.

Stamen Tassev

Stanoy Tassev



Hon. Gary L. Sharpe, Senior U.S. District Judge  
James T. Foley U.S. Courthouse  
445 Broadway, Room 112  
Albany, NY 12207

Dear Judge Sharpe:

I am Iani Tassev's older and only brother. I have known Iani personally for the last 35 years but I have also been fortunate to work with him very closely for the last 10 years in various roles and companies. I have been the owner and President of USA Battery LLC (DBA: Bridgeview Power) for more than 7 years and owner and President of System Engineering International (DBA: Critical Power USA) between 2013 and 2016.

I know that Iani is facing sentencing and I write this letter of support with no reservation or hesitation. Iani is a truly exceptional person with amazing personal and professional qualities. My biggest challenge is to condense so much I would like to share to give you the most accurate portrayal.

My family background is important to mention here because Iani comes from a very supportive, well educated, and honest family. My father graduated from Harvard with Master of Public Administration and International Tax Law degree and has help many top executive positions for the Bulgarian government and well recognized private corporations such as KPMG. My mother has Economics and Statistics degree and has spent most of her career at the Council of Ministers in Bulgaria. My parents worked 3 jobs to support our dreams of pursuing our education in the US. We have never run into trouble with authorities on any issue. Iani has always been loved and taught to help others.

Iani graduated from a very prestigious preparatory school in Concord, MA, called Middlesex School. He received full scholarship. It is a very demanding and competitive school, but Iani was well recognized and respected in the community. He has been very appreciative of the opportunity and chance to study there and has given back donations regularly to the school. He even organized a very large trip for the entire boys and girls soccer team at Middlesex to visit Bulgaria and play games but also receive a true cultural exposure. He worked part time at the school to help pay for his education as well. He followed similar successful path with BA in Economics at Bard College. He is a self-taught software engineer outside of his college studies

and managed to excel in Spanish and other disciplines. His intellectual curiosity and maturity helped him thrive with not only good grades but recognition amongst faculty members. He was eager to gain financial independence from my parents at an early stage and perhaps this may have contributed to some bad choices he has made.

Iani really demonstrated his unmatched work ethic, passion for success, and entrepreneurial abilities at USA Battery since 2010. This was a 20-year-old New York business that had only 2 employees and mediocre presence in the marketplace. In 6 quick years our company had achieved 28x times higher revenue, presence in 7 states (MA, NY, NH, MD, FL, IL, NV), full time staff of 26, and absorbed 3 other struggling companies. It is important to note that Iani was fully dedicated to his workplace but found great joy in teaching and helping other progress in the organization. He worked extremely hard during regular hours and then continued well into the night each day, making sure that all issues with staff, supply of goods, IT systems, or logistics issues were resolved. He was resourceful, spent a lot of time training people, and really cared for all employees like they were siblings. I never heard of a single complaint that Iani refused to help or could not resolve an issue even though he was easily putting 80 or more working hours per week. Iani would jump in his car and drive 4 hrs to the Boston office, fix a telephone or computer issue, not show any frustration or unpleasantness with the local staff, and then drive back to New York the same day.

Iani went beyond helping employees in his professional capacity. Whether it was financial help to purchase a car for our Nevada warehouse manager, relocating employees to another state, solving personal hardship, driving employees to the doctor office or train station, borrowing his car for extend period of time, or sleeping in his apartment, Iani gave more than what was expected of him. People really looked up and respected Iani not just as the owner/manager but as a friend and someone that cared for their well being and professional progress. Most importantly he is extremely reliable, when he promised something, it always got accomplished.

Iani was instrumental in revolutionizing the distribution of sla batteries online. We brought wholesale prices and value to the masses. He designed and initiated the IT systems that now support more than 10,000 orders per month and have surpassed 500,000 customers in total. Amongst the customers are federal, state and city agencies, schools and universities, fortune 500 companies, non-profits, military, courts, and even prisons. His innovative ideas, successful business development, and incredible passion to succeed earned him incredible reputation amongst employees, customers, vendors, and business partners. He certainly helped me create a very special family at USA Battery.

Similar to USA Battery, Iani helped me manage and grow Critical Power USA into a premier provider of critical power solutions. We took over this 30+ years old business that started with 6-7 employees with presence in 2-3 states in 2013 and ended up finishing 2016 with over 30 employees and expansive presence on the entire East Coast. Again, Iani demonstrated unsurpassed dedication and work ethic, but the most memorable part is how he changed people's lives. He personally invested a lot of time in identifying, recruiting and training field

engineers that under a different leadership would never enjoy the current economic benefit or career opportunities they have.

He truly gave hope and opportunity to many people in the organization that will be remembered for a lifetime. Iani developed basic warehouse laborers to be full-fledged engineers with benefits and high pay to provide for their families. We helped people relocate back to their original home states where they reunited with family and friends compared to their previous, we gave them positions where they excelled and were truly happy. I will never forget when he put together the office desk and got on the floor dirty connecting the computer for our Senior Service Manager. The employee was absolutely baffled and could not believe that his superior would kneel down and do the dirty work and at the same time manage one of the largest independent critical power companies in the country. Iani was very dedicated, passionate, and selfless. He is very approachable and personable with friends and co-workers, he was the one to make people open up and share what they really thought. Vendors and customers really enjoyed working with Iani. One senior manager at Comcast still calls to check with him despite the sale of the business for more than a year.

The professional success is a great contribution to the economy and society as a whole. Indeed, Iani was a large tax payer for the last 7 year and hopefully many to come. He was honest, positive, and relentless in finding solutions in his leadership positions. He truly flourished after 2011 into a great leader and person many admire now. Iani is a visionary and a rare find for any company or community.

On a personal level, I am proud of Iani's accomplishments in the last 7 years. Iani takes feedback and criticism very seriously. He would never be offended when he is provided feedback. Instead he would take to heart and thank me, take responsibility of the situation and work hard to turn around things. He strives to be always informed and educated. He is the one to convince me in attending various industry conferences or educational seminars.

He also started a great family life and has 2 absolutely beautiful children. His kids are well behaved and very advanced for their age because Iani commits a lot of time to them. He is not just the breadwinner of the family but also the organizer, teacher, babysitter, planner, and all other possible roles. He is extremely important for the kids development and he is a role model for many friends. One common friend from Texas shared with me that Iani was his aspiration to start a family and have kids.

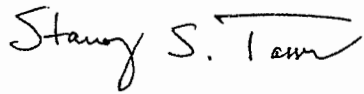
He pays close attention to our parents and talks with them daily. He checks on academic progress or overall development with me and my kids. He does not forget birthdays, name days, or other special anniversaries. His circle of friends is certainly one of the largest I know, and also quite diverse one as well. He has exceptional ability to adapt and find common ground with all types of people.

Our entire family supports Iani through this difficult period. He has expressed and talked to me and my parents numerous times how much he regrets the events and his judgement that have

led him to the present situation. He is the last person that comes to mind that would take anything for granted in this life. Whatever is or has been his, he has always shared with family and friends. He is a very generous, good and loving person that will always be motivated to help the world in any way possible.

Lastly, I vouch for Iani very strongly. I have met many talented, smart, and skilled people in my life all around the world. He is a spark for sure, very passionate, full of energy, and truly inspirational person. I am happy to be his brother and business partner. I deeply hope that you have gotten a sense of the real person behind the name Iani Tassev and his past and future potential to be a positive contribution to our society.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stanoy S. Tassev". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Stanoy Tassev